

Open Adoption: Trends From the Field

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Every Step of the Way

**ADOPTIONS
TOGETHER**

Historical Perspective

- Adoptions Together founded in 1990 to welcome every child in need of a permanent family regardless of need of child. Licensed in Maryland, DC and Virginia.
- Non paternalistic organization designed to educate, guide, counsel, support and encourage adults to take charge of planning for children

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Background of Agency

- 1990 to 2013 fully facilitated 3100 adoptions; 1300 local infant adoptions and 1800 international and US foster care adoptions; assisted with permanency for many more
- Full spectrum of attachment focused/ trauma informed family support services (adoption expertise), training and educational programs
- Strong focus on permanency with a variety of partner programs with public agencies

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Core Principles that Guide Our Practice

- The needs of children come first
- Openness and honesty is healthy for children and families.
- **Information is power**
- The best decisions are made by informed, thoughtful people
- Children deserve to be raised in stable, loving permanent families
- Adoption is a one time legal event with life long implications for all members of the triad
- Children need to maintain connections with their birth families and cultures even when they cannot be safely raised in their birth families.

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Basic Assumptions continued....

- Creating, strengthening and sustaining healthy relationships is essential for achieving permanency
- Post adoption support is critical!



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What We Know

- The lens in which we see our clients impacts how they think about their situation
- By being continually open to learn, our practice has consistently evolved to meet the needs of those we serve



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How is Open Adoption Defined?

- Full disclosure of identifying information between Birth and Adoptive parents.
- Continued in person contact as child matures
- Contact may be facilitated by agency staff or on their own
- A range of openness exists across a continuum. Each family system unique



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Historical Context of our Work

- Adoptive Parents required to do yearly written updates to be available for Birth Parents
- Relationship one dimensional and some Adoptive Parents resented it
- Birth Parents who rejected post adoption contact were told that updates would be here.

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Trends We Have Seen in the Area of Open Adoption

- In the early years we had a small portion of fully open adoptions and the majority of dyads exchanged letters and pictures.
- Of the fully open adoptions, most were with birth parents who chose adoption and were relatively stable
- As children got older and had questions more families began calling to try and open their adoptions

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Trends (assumptions)

- Small numbers of birth parents initiating unplanned post adoption contact
- When Adoptive parents just disappeared we aggressively pursued. Over time we learned that family challenges were at the root (fear motivated)
- When Birth parents disappeared it felt less dramatic (we learned to take it more seriously and explore what was going on)

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More Trends

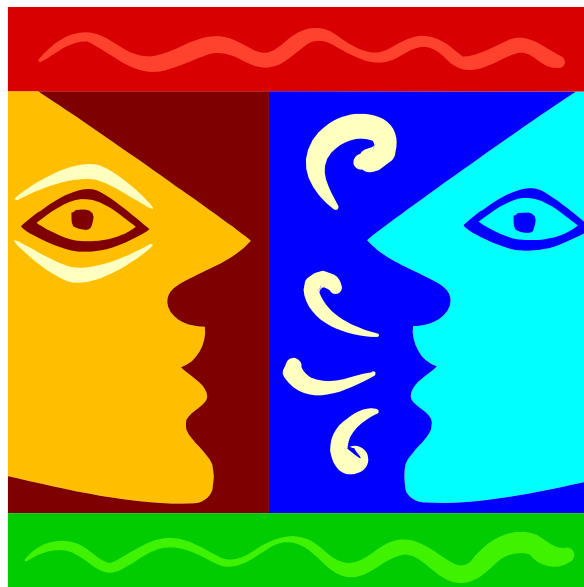
- With more sophistication we facilitated open adoptions with parents who were less stable. Just added more support.
- For years we focused the openness education on the Adoptive Parents and helped them stretch
- Over time noted imbalance between what Adoptive and Birth Parents wanted in terms of openness
- Educating birth parents differently about open adoption increased frequency.

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Power of words

- The language we use directly impacts the outcome – today all language is framed in context of relationship



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Language of Relationship Based Open Adoption

- Your child's extended family
- "Getting together" vs. " Visitation"
- Problem solving together rather than shutting down when conflict arises
- This is a new relationship and all parties may need support and guidance at developmental stages in relationship. Normalize challenges and be there with support

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Four Notable Trends Impacting Open Adoption

- Laws regarding enforcement of post adoption agreements
- Social media has changed face of confidentiality
- Research findings have informed how we talk about open adoption
- Open adoption has moved from a fringe practice to mainstream. Movement from position of embracing a child's birth family rather than erasing it. (paradigm of adoption shifting)

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Laws Regarding Enforcement of Post Adoption Agreements

- Presently of the 50 states, 32 have laws that govern post adoption agreements.
- Only 25 states have language that makes contract legally enforceable
- No remedies relate to the legality of the adoption and all take into consideration the best interest of the child

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Social Media (internet) has Changed Face of Adoption/ Confidentiality

- Most of us turn to the internet as the primary source of info
- Geography no longer relevant
- We can find anyone and anything on the internet with limited info – facebook, etc.
- Children have access to the internet
- Communication can be instant – IMPULSE!!!



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Research Findings have Informed how We Talk About Open Adoption

- Many studies reflect that the experience of open adoption is a positive for children, birth and adoptive parents
- Research is on the internet and easily accessible
- Enough longitudinal studies available to show benefits of open adoption – reached tipping point.

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Open Adoption has Moved from a Fringe Practice to Mainstream

- Most agencies now promote open adoption as primary way to create an adoption plan
- Birth parents from all walks of life are considering the possibility
- Many child welfare agencies are using open adoption as a tool to mediate and prevent involuntary TPR. Builds on relationships developed during concurrent planning.

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Open Adoption consistent with
greater social trends of openness
“out of the closet”

Act as if what you do makes a
difference. It does.

William James

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